

### Amendments to the Claims

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application.

### Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently amended) An apparatus comprising a carrier adapted to protect a head stack assembly comprising a cantilevered flexure which supports a transducer at a distal end thereof, the carrier comprising a carrier support surface arranged to continuously, contactingly support the distal end of the flexure adjacent the transducer and to permit a subsequent engagement of a medial portion of the flexure by a merge tool which disengages the flexure from the carrier support surface while merging the transducer with a recording surface, wherein the carrier further comprises a retention feature which engages an edge of the head stack assembly to retain the carrier on the head stack assembly, the retention feature comprising a flange which forms a channel, the channel engaging the edge of the head stack assembly.

2. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the carrier further comprises an elongated body having a medial portion that extends adjacent the medial portion of the flexure and a distal end which supports the carrier support surface.

Claims 3-4 (Cancelled).

5. (Original) The apparatus of claim 1, further comprising the carrier in combination with the merge tool.

6. (Original) The apparatus of claim 5, wherein the merge tool comprises a main body portion and a cantilevered arm which extends from the main body portion, the cantilevered arm having a first portion configured to extend adjacent and substantially parallel to the head stack assembly a separation distance less than a maximum width of said flexure and a second portion which extends substantially perpendicular to the head stack assembly.

7. (Original) The apparatus of claim 6, wherein the merge tool further comprises a merge support surface which extends from the second portion of the cantilevered arm, the merge support surface adapted to engage the medial portion of the flexure while the distal end of the flexure remains supported by the carrier support surface.

Claim 8 (Cancelled).

9. (Currently amended) An apparatus comprising a merge tool adapted to install a head stack assembly adjacent a disc stack, the head stack assembly comprising a cantilevered flexure which supports a transducer at a distal end thereof, the merge tool comprising a merge support surface arranged to contactingly engage a medial portion of the flexure thereby disengaging previous contacting engagement of the distal end of the flexure by a carrier and advancing the transducer to a final position adjacent a recording surface of the disc stack, wherein the merge tool further comprises a main body portion and a cantilevered arm which extends from the main body portion, the cantilevered arm having a

first portion configured to extend adjacent and substantially parallel to the head stack assembly a separation distance less than a maximum width of said flexure and a second portion which supports the merge support surface and extends substantially perpendicular to the head stack assembly.

Claim 10 (Cancelled).

11. (Original) The apparatus of claim 9, further comprising the merge tool in combination with the carrier.

12. (Original) The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the carrier comprises an elongated body having a medial portion that extends adjacent the medial portion of the flexure and a distal end which supports a carrier support surface which contactingly engages the distal end of the flexure.

13. (Original) The apparatus of claim 11, wherein the carrier further comprises a retention feature which engages an edge of the head stack assembly to retain the carrier on the head stack assembly.

Claim 14 (Cancelled).

15. (Currently amended) An apparatus, comprising:

a carrier adapted to protect a head stack assembly comprising a cantilevered flexure which supports a transducer at a distal end thereof, the carrier comprising a carrier support surface arranged to contactingly support the distal end of the flexure by continuous deflection of said distal end; and

a merge tool adapted to merge the transducer with a recording surface comprising a merge support surface arranged to contactingly support a medial portion of the flexure while the carrier support surface is disposed between the merge support surface and the transducer, the merge tool comprising a main body portion and a cantilevered arm which extends from the main body portion, the cantilevered arm having a first portion configured to extend adjacent and substantially parallel to the head stack assembly a separation distance less than a maximum width of said flexure and a second portion which extends substantially perpendicular to the head stack assembly.

16. (Original) The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the carrier further comprises an elongated body having a medial portion that extends adjacent the medial portion of the flexure and a distal end which supports the carrier support surface.

17. (Original) The apparatus of claim 15, wherein the carrier further comprises a retention feature which engages an edge of the head stack assembly to retain the carrier on the head stack assembly.

Claims 18-20 (Cancelled).